

The Robert's Gap Project Environmental Assessment (EA) on the Big Piney Ranger District of the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests is available for review and comments. The EA, cover letter and legal notice can be found at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=53597>

The proposed project is an activity implementing a land management plan and is subject to pre-decisional objection process at 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B.

The Robert's Gap Project area is comprised of 39,697 acres of National Forest lands in Newton and Madison Counties, Arkansas. Maps showing the proposed action and alternatives can be viewed on the webpage above. The Proposed Action, a No Action (Alternative I), a No Herbicide (Alternative II), and a Other Resources alternative (Alternative III) were analyzed in the EA. I have identified Alternative 3 as the preferred alternative.

The activities proposed for this project have been designed to:

- Promote native forests that are more resilient to natural disturbances by improving forest health and increasing diversity of species composition and productivity.
- Maintain and improve water quality as this area holds the headwaters of the White River, Kings River, and Buffalo River.
- Reduce hazardous fuels and increase herbaceous plant species.
- Address access and visitor use concerns for the mountain bike trail system and Upper Buffalo Wilderness Area.

The specific proposed activities for this project may be viewed in Chapter II of the EA.

Although a preferred alternative has been identified, the final decision on which alternative to implement has not been made. You may help in making this decision by providing comments on the EA. The opportunity to comment ends 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in Russellville's The Courier (§218.25(a)(i)), the Big Piney Ranger District's paper of record. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments §218.2 regarding the proposed project or activity during a public comment period established by the responsible official are eligible to file an objection §218.24(b)(6). For issues to be raised in objections, they must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project or activity and attributed to the objector §218.25(3)(iii). The publication date of the legal notice in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to submit written comments on a proposed project or activity §218.25(2). The time period for the opportunity to comment on a proposed project or activity to be documented with an environmental assessment shall not be extended §218.25(a)(iv). It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure their comments are received in a timely manner §218.25(a)(iii).

Please submit your written comment(s) to Timothy E. Jones, Big Piney Ranger District, 12000 SR 27 Hector, AR 72843. To lessen the possibility for transmission of COVID-19, we will not accept hand-delivered comments until further notice. If you have no way to deliver your written comments except in person, or if you have any questions regarding this process, please call (870) 446-5122 ext. 5136. Please leave your name, a daytime telephone number, and a brief message. Your call will be returned during our regular business hours (7:30 am to 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday, except federal holidays). Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc, .docx) to: [comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-bayou@usda.gov](mailto:comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-bayou@usda.gov)

For objection eligibility, each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project or activity must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request §218.24(b)(8). Please state "Robert's Gap Project" in the subject line when providing electronic comments, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic I had shared plans to have a public tour of the Robert's Gap area in conjunction with the 30-day comment period. I wanted to let each of you know that due to safety concerns of a public gathering, we are not able to safely offer this type of tour.

Because the EA is being reviewed both internally and externally during this 30-day period, it can be expected that the EA may have minor changes which will not affect the analysis or the results of the assessment, but serve to clarify and enhance the disclosure of effects.

Additional information, including hard copies are available by contacting Mike Mulford, NEPA Coordinator, Big Piney Ranger District, P.O. Box 427, Jasper, AR 72641; (870) 446-5122 ext. 5136. Please leave your name, a daytime telephone number, and a brief message. Your call will be returned during our regular business hours (7:30 am to 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday, except federal holidays) or contact via e-mail: [michael.mulford@usda.gov](mailto:michael.mulford@usda.gov). This legal published in The Courier on 8/7/20.